

Learning to Hunt

Hosting a hunting-based outdoor skills event in your community



Mary Kay Salwey, Ph.D.
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Credits

Project Director

Mary Kay Salwey, Ph.D.
Wisconsin DNR
Bureau of Wildlife Management
Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Editorial Assistance

Nancy Williams
Carrie L. Armus

Artwork

Eric DeBoer
Mary Kay Salwey
Dynamic Graphics
Cindie Brunner

Photos

Robert Queen
Mary Kay Salwey
Mike Roach

Design Concept

Blue Raven Graphics

Electronic Layout

Mary Kay Salwey, Wisconsin DNR

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Trailing the Whitetail

Deer hunting techniques

Participants learn to scout for deer, select a good area for setting up a stand, follow blood trails, and tag, transport and register deer.



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Objectives

Participants shall:

identify and interpret deer sign such as rubs, scrapes, browsed twigs, tracks, droppings, and blood trails.

identify safe versus unsafe shots and articulate why these are so.

demonstrate where a “clean” shot would be on a deer.

demonstrate how to track a wounded deer.

demonstrate how to tag and register a deer.

Equipment

Tree stands with safety harnesses and haul lines
Firearms, portable gun rack, dummy ammunition
Life-size 3-D decoys of bucks and does
Life-size deer target with one side showing a cutaway view of vital organs
Fake blood made from corn syrup or glycerin mixed with red food coloring
Frozen deer carcass from a road kill (with game warden’s permission)
Baking soda
Plastic garment bags

Cover scents such as fox, raccoon or skunk

Real or synthetic deer antlers for rattling

Grunt and bleat calls

Deer scent

Examples of deer droppings

Back tag holders with old, unused back tags, a piece of string

An old deer hunting license

An old antlerless permit

Hunting knife

Drag line and harness

Camouflage and blaze orange clothing appropriate for archery or gun deer seasons

Canvas sack filled with sand equal in weight to that of a typical deer

“How-to” publications and posters on deer hunting

Sources include:

Deer and Deer Hunting

Magazine, Krause

Publications, Box 1117,

Appleton, WI 54912;

Phone: (715) 445-2214

Whitetails Unlimited, Box

720, Sturgeon Bay, WI

54235; (920)743-6777

The Complete Hunter Series:

Whitetail Deer

Whitetail: Techniques & Tactics

Understanding Whitetails

Advanced Whitetail Hunting



Station Setup

Secure tree stands to appropriately sized trees. Tie safety belt or harness around the tree at the top of each stand. Affix a haul line to a branch near the top of each stand. Place guns on a gun rack near the tree stands. Have a pouch of dummy ammunition ready near gun rack. Set up ground stands in likely sites.

Place deer decoys in a variety of shoot/don't shoot situations. For example, one decoy should be near a ridge top, or in dense brush. One should be near water, if available. One should be placed so that it would be considered a good shot. This decoy should be the one that has a cut-away view of the vital organs on the other side. Place all these deer at different distances to help participants estimate distances.

Prepare fake blood using red food coloring mixed with either corn syrup or glycerin. Both solutions simulate blood thickness and consistency. Lay out a blood trail leading from the one deer decoy that is an obvious good shot to a frozen or freshly thawed, warden-approved roadkill deer.

Have sample clothing in blaze orange and camouflage in separate plastic garment bags ready for demonstration.

If possible, preserve deer droppings from different times of the year.

Talk with your local conservation warden about this activity. Ask if the warden would be willing to participate. Also ask one of your local deer registration station attendants to participate in this activity.



A mixture of corn syrup and red food coloring makes an excellent imitation of real blood.



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Background Information

Instructors may want to review a number of excellent publications from the publishers of **Deer and Deer Hunting** magazine or from Whitetails Unlimited. **Deer and Deer Hunting** magazine produces a poster on *White-tailed Deer Anatomy*, and a spiral bound publication on basics of deer hunting including plastic overlays of deer anatomy called *Advanced Whitetail Details*. Whitetails Unlimited, of Sturgeon Bay, WI also produces a variety of excellent publications and posters. These background information sources can provide additional teaching

ideas as well as posters that instructors can use for this activity station.

In addition, the series of books called "The Complete Hunter" published by Creative Publishing International of Minnetonka, MN, has a nice selection of books on whitetailed deer hunting. These books are available at most major outdoor retail stores.



Before you hunt, make certain your equipment is in proper working order.

Pre-hunt scouting and preparation

Procedure

Begin this activity by discussing the need for pre-season scouting. Take your group out into the surrounding area and look for signs of deer. Look for buck rubs on small saplings where buck antlers have shredded off the bark about 1 to 3 feet above the ground. Rubs are visual and scented signposts. Look also for scrapes. These are spots near trees where bucks have pawed up a bare patch of earth and then urinated in that spot. Scrapes are used to determine the breeding status of does as well as to mark territories. Look for hoof prints; point out the dew claws, if visible. Measure distance between prints. Was the deer walking or running? Look for and follow deer trails. See if you can locate bedding spots. Where do the deer go to feed? Where do they go to rest or sleep? Look for deer droppings. Show participants your samples of preserved deer droppings gathered at different times of the year. Show these to your participants and discuss the differences in the scat.

Ask participants what signs they should look for when selecting a place to hunt deer? They should look for areas into which deer are forced to funnel such as a narrow strip of land connecting two larger landmasses. A good instance of a natural funnel is a beaver dam that connects one side of a stream or pond to the other. Look for bedding areas where the grass or snow is packed down. Bucks will urinate in their beds, but does usually do not. Look for possible

Activity A



Scout the area you plan to hunt well in advance of your hunting trip.

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escape routes at each selected location. Look for shed antlers. Look for game trails that converge on each other or strips of cover winding through open areas. These are excellent locations for a stand. Setting up a stand between where deer eat and where they bed is also a good bet for success.

Discuss some of the actions hunters take to prepare themselves for the hunt. These include washing themselves and their clothes in baking soda, line drying their clothes and storing them in clean plastic garment bags. Another trick is to use cover scents such as earth, fox, skunk or raccoon scents, to mask the scent

of humans. Or they can wear rubber boots to eliminate their scent from the ground. Once dressed for the hunt, the hunter should stay away from odors such as those found at a gas station, cooking scents, smoke or perfumed products. They should avoid touching branches and should urinate in a bottle, rather than on the ground.

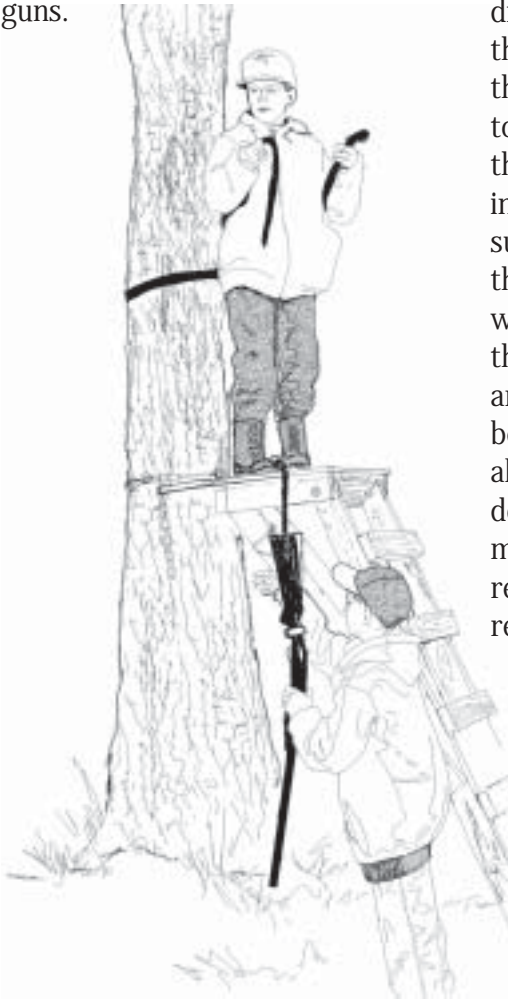
Preparing for a deer hunt in Wisconsin's great northwoods often means studying topographic maps prior to your hunt. Get to know the lay of the land, both by maps and by walking the land before you hunt.



Calling deer & using tree stand safety

Procedure

Have participants climb into a tree stand, put on the safety harness and hoist up an empty firearm into stand. (See Station #9 Ways of Hunting for more information). Next, have them load dummy rounds of ammunition into their guns.



While participants are in the stand, have each of them identify all the deer targets they can see from the stand. Ask participants to point out which targets are safe shots, which are unsafe shots and explain why. Ask them to estimate the distance from the deer targets to the stand. Ask them which deer they would shoot. Now ask them to think what part of the body they would aim for. Have them imagine they have shot but not successfully killed the deer. Ask them to mentally mark the spot where the deer was last seen in their field of view from the stand, and wait 15 minutes before beginning to track the deer, to allow enough time for it to go down. Have them wait 15 minutes in the stand so they can realize just how long 15 minutes really is.

Now have them unload their gun, lower it down off the stand, unharness themselves and safely descend from the tree stand. They should pace off the distance from the tree stand to the deer target they just “shot.” Have the only safe shot be a decoy that shows the

Activity B

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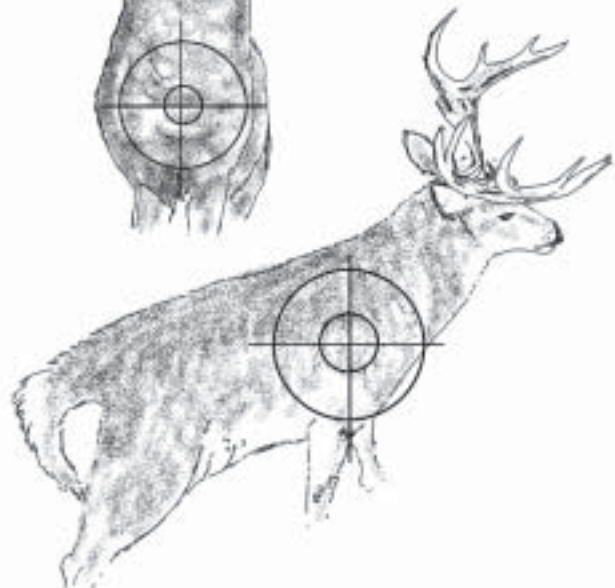
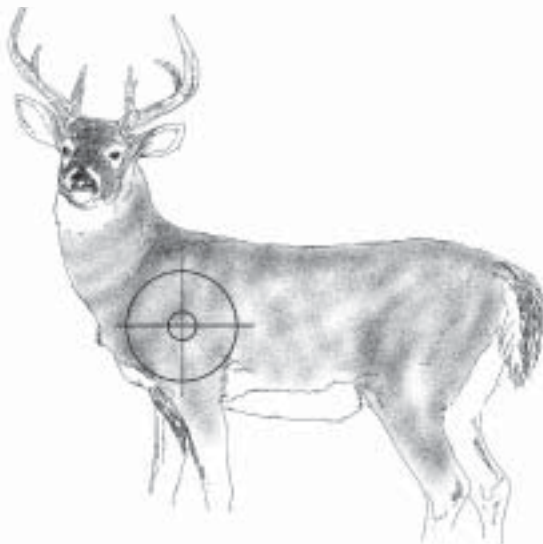
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internal organs on the reverse side of the deer.

Ask participants to point to the place on the decoy for which they had been aiming. Ask them why they think that place would

produce a clean shot. Have them look on the opposite side of the deer decoy to see which vital organs their shot would have struck. Was it a killing shot? Discuss ways of calling deer into a stand. Sometimes, hunters call in deer by rattling antlers. When a buck or doe hears the sounds of battling bucks, they may approach out of curiosity. Participants can use real deer antlers, or they can purchase synthetic ones from sporting goods stores. Demonstrate how to use the rattling antlers, then let your participants practice. Point out that the best results often occur when rattling is accompanied by the sounds of thrashing brush and pounding turf.



White-tailed deer also respond to a variety of other sounds, including grunts and bleats. Demonstrate how and when to use these calls. Tell participants that these calls may be purchased at sporting goods stores. Allow participants an opportunity to try them out.

You may also want to discuss and demonstrate the use of some of the many liquid scents that are on the market.



Activity
C

Trailing, tagging & transporting deer

Procedure

Now ask your participants to assume they have actually shot a deer. Explain that they should always treat every deer they shoot at as a wounded deer, until evidence proves otherwise. Many times, deer give absolutely no

indication that they have been shot. They often bound away for dozens of yards, out of sight, seemingly unaffected.

Tell your group that one sure sign that they have hit a deer is by finding drops of blood.

Blood can give clues pointing to where the deer was shot.

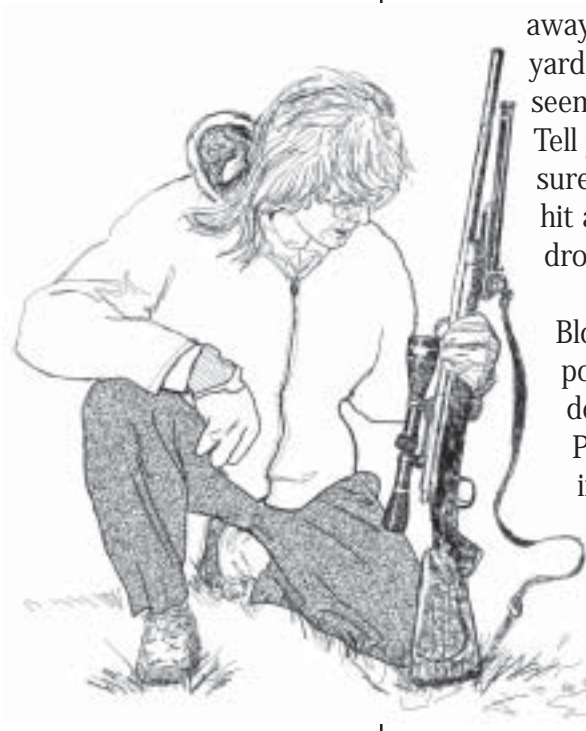
Pinkish, frothy blood indicates a lung shot.

Injured deer will blow this type of blood through their nose or mouth while running. If there

is a lot of bright red blood, that usually indicates a heart shot. If the blood is dark red, the liver has been shot. Deer shot in the liver take an hour or two to die. Have your participants look for and

follow the fake blood trail you set out earlier.

When the group finds the hidden roadkill deer, have the participants gather around the deer. Tell your participants that before they approach a deer they believe to be dead they should make certain it is truly dead by first checking for its reflexes. A wounded deer can still make an escape and a fatally wounded deer can inflict serious wounds with flailing hooves and antlers. Approach the deer from the back and rear well out of reach of its sharp hooves and antlers. Be prepared to make a final killing shot. Look for signs of life: breathing, blinking, and quivering movements. If the animal's eyes are wide open, unblinking and staring with a blank expression, chances are good the deer is dead. To be absolutely certain, touch the deer with your gun barrel, arrow or stick. This will reveal whether the animal is dead or just traumatized. If the deer is not dead, tell participants how they should administer the final killing shot.



Have participants follow a fake blood trail that you've previously made. This will test their ability to follow a wounded deer....an experience that replicates real life.

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Ask one of the participants to demonstrate how to legally tag the deer. Stress to the participants they are not to move the deer they shoot until they first place a validated carcass tag on the antler or ear of the deer. Have one participant take an old back tag off his or her back, rip off the carcass tag from the back tag, validate the carcass tag with date, time, sex of deer. Then ask this participant to fasten the carcass tag to the antler or ear of the deer with a piece of string. Instructors can set up scenarios such as having the downed deer be a doe, but having the selected participant not have a hunter's choice permit. Ask the participants what to do in that situation.

Make prior arrangements to have a local warden participate in this activity. Ask the warden to walk onto the scene as the participant has just finished tagging the deer and have the warden request the hunter's license to see if the deer has been properly tagged.

Tell participants that they will learn to field dress a deer at another teaching station. For now, have them experience what it is like to drag a tagged deer out of the woods. You could use the roadkill deer, but you can also take a canvas sack filled with sand and allow participants to work in teams to drag the "sack deer" a given distance. If a vehicle is available, have the participants try to lift the deer or the sack into the back of a truck or into the trunk of a car. Discuss the need to be legal but discreet when displaying deer. The sight of a dead deer displayed openly on a vehicle often disturbs the non-hunting public.

Have participants experience what it's like to drag a deer carcass out of the woods by substituting a sand-filled canvas sack weighing about 150 lbs.



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Remind participants to have respect not only for the deer but also for other people's feelings and ask that they take as many steps as necessary to legally conceal the deer. For instance, they should throw a tarp over the carcass whenever their vehicle is traveling down a public road in Wisconsin.

Explain the procedures for registering deer. If possible, ask one of your local deer registration station attendants to come and describe the process.

Tell your participants that the important thing is to have a safe and enjoyable hunt whether they get a deer or not.


End of Teaching Station



Have participants try their hand at lifting a deer carcass (or a sand-filled sack) onto the top of a car or truck.



Provide participants with an opportunity to learn how to properly tag and register a deer. Work with your local wardens to obtain a fresh or frozen road-killed deer to use as a prop for this exercise.

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References

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